

VZCZCXRO9524
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHUJA #0968/01 1381210
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181210Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9536
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0336
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 6875
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000968

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: SHAYKH MINIMIZES MILITANCY PROSPECTS IN NORTH,
NIGERIAN "TALIBAN" ATTACK

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Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b
& d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On May 10, PolOffs met with Kano State Government Senior Adviser on Religious Affairs and respected Islamic scholar Shaykh Aminudeed Abubakar who provided insight into the religious landscape of Kano. He minimized the potential for militancy in northern Nigeria, claiming that Nigerian Muslims were more preoccupied with matters of daily survival than religious polemics or extremism. Shaykh Abubakar also cast doubt on the validity of April 17-18 reports that 500 suspected Nigerian "Taliban" had killed several policemen in the Panshekara suburb of Kano metropolis. Following the May 10 meeting of the Kano State Government Council of Senior Advisers in which the Panshekara incident was discussed, the Shaykh claimed that no evidence, including bodies of the alleged "Taliban" perpetrators, had been recovered, suggesting that the incident may have been fabricated or exaggerated. An official inquiry into the matter was opened on May 7, yet as of May 18 scant information aside from official Kano Government statements has surfaced. Media reports and other anecdotal data maintain that fewer than twenty militants were involved in the incident. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Kano State Government Senior Adviser on Religious Affairs, Islamic scholar, and qadi (Sharia court judge) Shaykh Aminudeed Abubakar spoke about the religious landscape of Kano, explaining that Muslims belong to one of the following three Islamic sects: Tijaniyya, Qadiriyya, or Izala bida'a Sunnah (Izala). Indigenous to northern Nigeria (and West Africa), the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya sects comprise the majority of followers while the more Wahhabi-oriented Izala movement commands a substantial minority. Despite sometimes significant differences in opinion, the three Islamic sects according to Shaykh Abubakar coexist relatively peacefully. With respect to the April 2 vandalism of the 10 kilowatt transmitter of the Kano-based private Freedom Radio station, in which possibly Tijaniyya or Qadiriyya youth were alleged to have partaken in protest of an Izala guest (who railed against the Tijaniyya/Qadiriyya celebration of the Prophet's birthday) the Shaykh asserted that such an incident was "rare and unfortunate." He continued, stating in Arabic that "differences are a mercy not a reason to quarrel." The Shaykh also highlighted the superlative relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in Kano, emphasizing that the Muslims depend on the commercial expertise of the Igbo and literacy

of the Yoruba. Therefore, he noted, "we have learned to live peaceably together."

¶3. (C) When asked about the potential for militancy against Americans or sectarian violence in the North, Shaykh Abubakar remarked that the "appeal of bin Laden died out long ago." He noted that while posters of bin Laden had been scattered throughout Kano, adorning vehicles, storefronts, and t-shirts, following the September 11 attacks, a targeted "re-education" effort spearheaded by Kano's many prominent religious scholars had helped to stamp out "extremist sentiment." The Shaykh added that while ignorance in religious matters, specifically what "constitutes halal and haram" (religiously permissible and impermissible actions), was alarmingly widespread, most youth susceptible to extremist ideology or militant activity were appreciably more preoccupied with their own daily survival. Should those "material needs be met," he suggested, the prospects for militancy may be greater but still unlikely.

¶4. (C) Further, Shaykh Abubakar cast doubt on the validity of April 17-18 reports that 500 suspected Nigerian "Taliban" had killed several policemen in the Panshekara suburb of Kano metropolis. The Shaykh intimated that following the May 10 Council of Senior Advisers to Kano State Government meeting in which the Panshekara incident was discussed, Council members appeared suspicious that such an event in fact occurred. Abubakar said that after listening to anecdotes from residents of Panshekara, speaking with other Islamic scholars in Kano, visiting morgues, hospitals, and police stations to view the bodies of the alleged perpetrators, he remains dubious such an event took place. He also attempted to discredit the idea of a Nigerian "Taliban" stating that no such organization exists in Nigeria.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The aged Shaykh Aminudeed Abubakar hails

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from Kano State, where he received his formal Islamic training at Bayero University as a qadi (Sharia court judge) and faqih (scholar of Islamic jurisprudence). Fluent in Hausa, English, and Arabic, Shaykh Abubakar maintains contact with scholars from throughout the Islamic world, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Now retired from the courts, the Shaykh continues to mentor other Islamic scholars while also serving as Senior Adviser on Religious Affairs to the Kano State Government. Abubakar, who belongs to the majority Qadiriyya movement, does not head his own congregation.

¶6. (C) COMMENT CONT'D: In the latest census figures, Kano State emerged the most populous with an estimated 9.2 million residents. Historically, Kano serves as the commercial center of the Sahel, attracting merchants and traders from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and elsewhere. Religiously heterogeneous, culturally vibrant, and desperately poor, Kano is also politically volatile and dynamic. The intersection between politics and religion is often blurred and exploited for any number of reasons. The events (i.e., April 2 vandalism of the Freedom Radio transmitter, April 13 assassination of Shaykh Adam Ja'far, April 17-18 attack by the Nigerian "Taliban") in the lead up to and immediately following the April 14 gubernatorial race, which were ostensibly related to latent sectarian religious tensions in Kano, may well be more closely linked to a host of inherently political factors. Details surrounding the assassination of Shaykh Ja'far as well as the alleged Panshekara incident remain inconclusive and conjectural. Neither the Kano State Government nor the Federal Government has been willing to vigorously investigate either incident. END COMMENT.
CAMPBELL